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One doesn't need to be especially creative or innovative to come up with great new ideas, just smart enough to listen to creative people and collect ideas from experts.

In this spirit, the OWIC Executive Innovation Brief summarizes thinking from global innovation experts that we feel have application for forest industry companies.

In addition, each Brief includes insights from the group of advisors, listed below.

**Executive Brief Advisors**

Lyndall Bull, URS Corporation, Australia

Pablo Crespell, FP Innovations, Canada

Tony Flagor, International Forest Products Limited, USA

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OWIC EXECUTIVE INNOVATION BRIEF

## Regain Your Creative Confidence

Insights based on the article: **Reclaim Your Creative Confidence, How to Get Over the Fears that Block Your Best Ideas** by T Kelley and D Kelley. Harvard Business Review. December 2012.

Summary by: Eric Hansen, [Eric.Hansen@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Eric.Hansen@oregonstate.edu)

The authors of this article are the founder and chairman and general manager of IDEO, a well known design and innovation consulting firm. Visit their [site](#) to learn about their work. Forest sector company [Steelcase](#) is a client.

Helping people to, “rediscover their creative confidence” is what the authors see as their job as creativity and innovation consultants. People are born creative with vivid and crazy imaginations. This is considered cute and appropriate for a youngster, but from then on, society, parents, and schools set about squashing any semblance of creativity with a goal of everyone coloring inside the lines. Yet, the authors emphasize the importance of creativity for the success of any business.

Creative confidence is defined in the article as the natural ability to develop new ideas AND the courage to test them. To regain creative confidence, the authors offer strategies for getting past four fears they see as holding people back.

1. Fear of the messy unknown
2. Fear of being judged
3. Fear of the first step
4. Fear of losing control

They cite Albert Bandura from Stanford and his process of “guided mastery” as one way of overcoming fears. Dr. Bandura worked with people to overcome the fear of snakes by steadily increasing their exposure from seeing snakes in a cage all the way to handling them. My own experience with this sort of thing is related to heights. I've never liked heights, but during grad school I took a rappelling/ropes course that meant tens of hours dangling from a rope. I soon became rather comfortable in high places. However, some months away from the regular acclimatization and the old discomfort quickly returned. Another important element of Dr. Bandura's work is that the “guided mastery” had follow on effects where individuals worked harder and were more resilient when faced with failure because of their success in facing a fear.

**Fear of the Messy Unknown:** Empathy for customers is where the authors claim creative thinking in business starts. They advocate that you must get out of the comfort zone of your office and into the real world doing what they call “anthropological fieldwork.” This is

where insights about customers needs and challenges will come. I've heard many stories from industry managers about their “problem” customer. Once someone actually visited the customer's site and fully understood the issues, they were able to provide a product that more fully met the needs. This not only created a satisfied and committed customer, it sometimes even increased sales volume to the customer. Nothing can substitute for looking the customer in the eye and learning exactly what will satisfy their needs.

A messy unknown for many companies is exporting. This doesn't mean using an agent, but direct exporting with the requisite paperwork, understanding other cultures, etc. There is no reason a small, creative company cannot successfully enter the export market, but many do not because of the messy unknown.

**Fear of Being Judged:** “... you can't be creative if you are constantly censoring yourself.” Accordingly, the authors claim that an important first step is resisting the urge to judge yourself. One way of working in this direction is to systematically record your ideas—a list on your smart phone or on a white board in your office. On the other side of this, make sure that as a manager you establish an atmosphere within your team where people need not fear being judged.

**Fear of the First Step:** Bottom line, even with a great idea, the only way to reach a payoff is to get started. The authors claim their mantra is, “Don't get ready, get started!” Identify a small first step and make it happen. The momentum created by this initial foray will carry over into the rest of the project.

**Fear of Losing Control:** Working collaboratively means some loss of control. However, the gains in creativity can compensate the loss. The authors suggest breaking routines. For example, let someone junior in the organization plan the agenda for and lead a meeting. I have often heard from industry managers that when it comes to safety any member of the team can have a dramatic impact, even to the point of shutting down the line or the mill. What if this same mentality were applied to identifying and meeting customer needs?

While the authors are very focused on creativity at the individual level, the importance of the culture within which the individual works should not be discounted. As a manager, the policies you create, the design of your reward systems, and the way you assess performance all influence the creativity of your people. It is essential that you create an atmosphere where your people are comfortable taking risks, thereby allowing them to explore their creativity. Doing this, in essence, is a form of creativity on your part! The authors close their article with, “Let go of your fears and begin practicing creative confidence today.”